Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 23, 2015

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
2258-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Price
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
2465 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Price:

As you prepare the Transportation-HUD appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2016, we write to respectfully request a funding level for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)'s Fixed Guideway Capital Investment Grant Program, commonly known as New Starts and Small Starts, which exceeds the President's budget request of $3.25 billion.

New Starts and Small Starts grants fund the creation or extension of existing fixed guideway transit systems, including commuter rail, light rail, heavy rail, bus rapid transit, streetcars, and ferries. Grants to these systems have facilitated the creation of dozens of new or extended public transportation systems in rural, suburban, and urban communities across America. Selected projects support local economies by creating construction jobs and connecting job-seeking commuters with employers, as well as facilitating regional mobility and tourism.

New Starts projects, like all transportation investments in metropolitan areas, must emerge from a regional, multi-modal transportation planning process. Projects are evaluated for inclusion in the program based on cost effectiveness, mobility improvements, operating efficiencies, and environmental benefits, among other criteria.

Congress has played a significant role in structuring the New Starts program, requiring the FTA to rigorously evaluate and rate New Starts projects according to their projected capital costs, operating costs, and ability to commit local funds to finance at least 40 percent of the project's construction. In addition, the FTA is required to examine each project's cost effectiveness, mobility improvements, environmental benefits, land use, operating efficiencies, and economic development. Only those projects that achieve established rating thresholds can receive a full funding grant agreement under which Federal funding can be committed.

High demand for program funding means that eligible projects currently face delays in securing grants and receiving full grant amounts, and that new applicants will be forced to wait in the pipeline until FTA can meet its current commitments.

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We therefore urge you to invest in our nation's transit systems in the FY 2016 T-HUD appropriations bill by providing robust funding for the New Starts and Small Starts Fixed Guideway Capital Investment Grant Program. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Jim Langevin
Member of Congress

William R. Keating
Member of Congress

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
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Alcee L. Hastings
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Corrine Brown
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Jerrold Nadler
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